

Behavior Basics

We used to look at the **form** of the behavior and punish, or find other ways to extinguish the behavior.

Example: Four-year-old Johnny tantrums, knocking toys off the shelves and kicking the wall, during clean up time and is put in time out. He is warned that if it happens again he will miss outdoor play, with the hope that he will change his behavior.

We now know that a child can use the same behavior in various situations for different reasons.

Example: As the teacher begins to read a book, Johnny tantrums, tearing posters off the wall and kicking the beanbag chair.

In the first scenario, Johnny did not want to clean up because he loves free play (avoidance of leaving a preferred activity). In this scenario, Johnny does not want to sit for a book (avoidance of a non-preferred activity).

Our job is to determine the **function** of, or cause, or motivation behind the behavior. All behavior occurs for a specific reason: to get something or to avoid/escape something.

Particular behaviors can be thought of as attempts to communicate wants and needs. Many children do not have the verbal skills to express these desires.

Examples: Amy wants a toy, so knocks a peer down to get it.

Charles has sat too long at circle time, so does cartwheels across the rug, dangerously close to his friends.

Barry wants Ms. Carson to talk to him, so he pulls Amanda's hair.

When we know the function of the behavior, we can help determine better ways of getting needs met through teaching socially appropriate, alternative behaviors. The function is not inappropriate; it is the behavior that causes the problem.

Functional Assessment of Behavior:

1. Observe the child in different settings across time. There are several ways to collect the data (frequency, duration, etc.). An effective method is through the use of an A-B-C chart.
2. Gather information from familiar adults (and maybe the child) through interviews and behavior checklists.
3. Define the behaviors concretely.
4. Document the environmental factors and setting events that reliably predict the behavior.
5. Record the antecedent triggers or cues that indicate an inappropriate behavior will happen. "What would make the behavior happen?"
6. Identify the maintaining consequences that continue to allow the behavior to happen in this environment (i.e., reinforces the behavior).
7. Develop a hypothesis (educated guess) about the function of the behavior.

Example: Barry pulls a peer's hair because he wants the teacher's attention. The behavior is reinforced because the teacher takes Barry aside, puts him on her lap, and talks about his behavior.

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Behavior Improvement Plans:

1. The goal is to teach a child how to get his/her needs and wants met while demonstrating socially appropriate behavior.
2. Determine the Desired Behavior: "What do you want him to do instead?"
3. Decide on an acceptable **Replacement Behavior**.
4. Teach and practice the new skills. You will have to meet the child "where he is."
5. Maintain use of the new behavior by eliminating the success of the old, inappropriate behavior (it cannot meet the same need anymore).
6. Set up the environment for success. Match academic expectations to the child's skills. Provide social supports as needed.
7. Provide precorrects (advanced reminders) and redirection (prompts) as needed.
8. Reinforce use of the new behavior and fade as possible. You may need to use tangibles, but they should always be paired with verbal identification of appropriate behavior. Fade to only verbals and/or a smile or thumbs up.
9. Collect data on changed behavior and adapt the plan as indicated.

TIPS:

1. It will get worse before it gets better. Expect escalation of the inappropriate behavior.
2. Set the limits and be consistent upfront. You are building a relationship.
3. 95% of the behavior change comes from the adult.
4. Remain emotionally detached during behavioral incidences, especially with adult attention seeking children.
5. Refrain from engaging in conversations with the child that contain rationalizations and explanations of expectations. Teach and practice expected behavior in advance and warnings become unnecessary.